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ABSTRACT

By its eleventh month, Study Unlimited, a joint effort of the Chicago Public Library and the City Colleges of Chicago, included over 100 students pursuing courses for credit in three different city locations. A method of study utilizing videocassettes in conjuction with texts, study guides, and a library of related readings made it possible for students to apply for their examinations when they felt ready to do so. A curriculum of essential general education courses leading to the Associate in Arts degree was available. The students could do all their work, including consultations with faculty and counselors, in the public library. Librarians aided the students and administered examinations. The program provided a viable educational alternative for the mature working person. (Author/PF)

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2

Chicago's Study Unlimited

COLLEGE COURSES IN THE LIBRARY

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Chicago's Study Unlimited: College Courses in the Library

Study Unlimited, a joint effort of the Chicago Public Library and the City Colleges of Chicago, is in its eleventh month with well over a hundred students pursuing courses for credit in three different city locations. A method of study which utilizes Sony videocassettes in conjunction with texts, study guides, and a library of related readings, makes it possible for students to apply for their examinations when they feel ready to do so. The classroom of the Study Unlimited student is his public library; his academic counselor from the college meets him there, and his TV teacher is contacted by phone and in person when he visits the branch periodically.

The curriculum is the core of courses which are essential general education leading toward the Associate in Arts degree. Soon to be added are the cassettes for preparation for the General Educational Development, and hopefully, to be developed, are review sessions for those who wish to study for credit by examination.

Close collaboration between the college and the library forms the basis for an interchange in which each institution perceives its unique role in reaching out to the student who cannot attend regular classes, but who can come at his own convenience for independent study. A summary of the program responsibility of each agency follows:

City Colleges of Chicago

1. provide accredited instructional opportunities in new and creative formats.

2. establish administrative procedures that are responsive to the needs of independent study students but consistent with sound academic standards.

3. provide adequate guidance and counseling in academic and/or career strategy determination.

4. recognize credit obtained through noninstructional and life experiences.

5. develop and conduct research programs.

Chicago Public Library

1. develops the library into a learning environment by providing appropriate study space and learning materials, print and nonprint.

2. establishes "learning advisory service" philosophy to give direction regarding sources for credit and not-for-credit study and to give students personalized help in the effective use of materials.

3. develcps the library into a learning environment by providing appropriate study space and learning materials, print and nonprint.

4. engages in the review of new and different kinds of educational technology.

5. cooperates with the CCC in designing and offering group learning events--such as workshops, films, and various cultural expositions.

If, indeed, as Library Journal for December 1, 1973 has it, the adult independent learner is the new public library focus, the Chicago experience is providing a viable way to experiment in this direction. Initially funded by the Illinois Junior College Board in the amount of $78,000, an added $96,000 has been advance to the City Colleges of Chicago for its role in the program. Chicago Public Library has received $146,288 from the Illinois State Library for the first two years of this project. CPL has pledged to continue budgeting in the amount of $63,000 for the third year as an in-kind contribution.

Library involvement in programs of credit study is not going unchallenged, however, and it is well to focus on some of the objections and to explore frankly some of the difficulties of implementation. Roger Morris in American Libraries for July-August 1973 points out that such efforts are economically ill-timed, since

federal funds are cut. This implies that funding is essential for any kind of innovative reach-out in the category of independent study. Certainly no one deprecates the helpfulness of duning to provide a period of trial, error, and evaluation which is expensive, and which has not been budgeted, to launch new programs. Alphonse Trezza, state librarian of Illinois, makes clear, however, that built in to any acceptable proposal must be a commitment to continuation by the sponsoring institution after the funding period. It was gratifying, therefore, at the launching of Study Unlimited during the first press conference to hear assurances from Dr. Oscar Shabat, chancellor of the City Colleges of Chicago and Dr. Alex Ladenson, chief librarian of the Chicago Public Library, that the expenses of the project would be incorporated into the regular operating budget for branch services after the expenditure of grant funds for the first two years. Mr. Morris is on firm ground when he points out that it is unfair to raise "great expectations" on the part of users and then to frustrate them by lack of this kind of commitment.

More philosophical is his objection to the library's being involved in change or extension of its traditional role as a "collector, organizer and guide" to informational resources. It should be pointed out that information is information, whether it is presented in the traditional format of the printed page or on a film or videotape. Subject content in all formats is the legitimate realm of library concern. In addition, some promotion or reach-out is involved in letting people know the varieties of format that have been acquired. Some teaching is involved in assisting patrons to locate and use various media with effectiveness and ease. Formal classes, academic counseling, the granting of credit, articulation procedures, record-keeping, the evaluation of learning, are all the province of the college or university. Providing a comfortable environment for study of related materials,

both print and nonprint, with expert assistance in taking advantage of these helps is the contribution of the library. The learners' adviser concept assigns to the librarian an extension of this role.

Needed is a "community of learning" as Director Les Sandy of City Colleges of Chicago terms it, where students coming into the library are known and feel welcomed and free to ask for assistance when they need it and to settle down and study when they don't. Genuine interest in students' progress through independent study is encouragement to people who are studying outside of traditional tracks, and Chicago Public Library is exercising special care to see that librarians appointed to Study Unlimited are genuinely interested in the total concept of the project. This was done by circulating a memo advertising openings throughout the system and watching for new applicants with AV experience and responsiveness to the program College Level Examination Program and GED study especially call for librarians who can point out resources to people who may never have used the library regularly and who can provide these patrons with a collection of materials to realize a goal. The College Entrance Examination Board's phrase "learners' adviser" is apt, to describe the librarian's function in the independent study programs. This is not to make the librarian a "teacher's aide" as the provocative phrase of Mr. Morris has it. Rather it is to utilize fully the professional expertise of a person who holds a master's degree in library science, always accompanied by special subject competence. The librarian-custodian is a hated and rejected stereotype. More is implied in Morris' term "guide" as applied to librarians than the ingrained image of the profession allows critics to imagine.

There will, it is true, be an "identifiable student body" in the library when Study Unlimited is introduced; there will be publicity to make the program

known; public relations departments of both CPL and the City Colleges of Chicago have been active here; students will be counseled in the use of the library and aided in the selection of helpful study materials. There may even be actual teaching sessions on library use, basic reference, the card or book catalog, Dewey or Library of Congress classification systems, and the arrangement and resources of the central library if these seem necessary or desirable. Librarians connected with Study Unlimited may administer prepared examinations. Diplomas, record-keeping, academic counseling, evaluation, all are the role of the City Colleges of Chicago and are understood as such by both cooperating institutions. There will be a microfilm record of each student at each of the centers with a microfiche reader at the Study Unlimited desk. This will make it possible for a student to ask for advice where it is most convenient for him. Librarians will not service these records, however; this is the function of the college.

The question of need for such library-based programs in independent study for credit must be considered. Are there students who would benefit from the opportunity to study on their own time and at their own pace in libraries? The answer seems simplistic: let's try it and see. To date the CCC-CPL experience seems to point up a need: it provides a simple, fairly unstructured way to start college. It costs only $7.50 for two 3-hour courses. Texts and study guides are available in the centers. Each student is assigned two viewing hours a week at the most convenient time possible for him. If he comes, he is assured of time at the videoplayer. If he doesn't, no one gets upset, and someone else may use his time. He can drop in and take his chances at having a videoplayer available, or use his time to study texts and related materials. The Study Unlimited student body numbers 239 registrants in three centers, though only about a hundred view regularly.

The centers take in geographical and cultural differences in the patrons served. Whitney Young center on the south side is in a middle-class black community. Porgage-Cragin on the northwest side serves a blue-collar industrial-residential center. The central library has a more cosmopolitan clientele. Opening on April 1 with concentration on GED preparation, are Legler in a low income black area and Northtown in a Jewish community. There is added cooperation with neighborhood agencies: the Jewish Vocational Service at Northtown and the West Garfield Park community center at Legler. The Chicago Skill Center is working with Study Unlimited and with these agencies in the areas of assessment, referral, and counseling. Median age is 37; 32 percent are men, and 68 percent are women. Most are working people, and the age range is the late twenties to early sixties. Inquiries have numbered over a thousand, and many of these will develop into active association when it is possible to get into CLEP and GED more fully--a project for spring 1974.

As to the appropriateness of the library as a base location for independent study, why not? Libraries are tax-supported study environments for the general public. With collections of print resources and growing collections of nonprint media, with personnel to aid in their location and use, with places to study quietly and places for discussion, they would seem to be natural habitats for people pursuing nontraditional programs. Les Sandy, director of the program, sees the library as a fitting and appropriate "people's university," the logical place for his extern collegians to pursue their career goals.

Internal problems of moving large bureaucracies, willing yet ponderous, abound. Part time, work/study people do not make the best office help for a struggling program; neither are they as committed to the library as fulltime employees would be. Where to get petty cash for unaccustomed expenditures like tissue and alcohol to sanitize earphones, how to serve punch and cookies to seventy five

students at a reception with their TV teachers when everything has to be purchased with pink PO's and reimbursed at a later date are problems which need solutions. How to orient branch staffs to a new program, keep coordinators and administrators informed keep service areas staffed and open, and arrange for furniture and materials in sixty days all need to be considered. Dr. Ladenson and Deputy Chief David Reich are generous with administrative ok's and increasingly things aren't like they used to be. Decentralization is creeping in. All special programs and funded projects suffer in this way from minor and not-so-minor frustrations. Admittedly, you can't think of everything in your budget proposal, but it's best to try.

In a timed project faced with on-going and final evaluation, time-honored procedures have often to be set aside. Access is important to the project director, and this means access to someone who can say "yes" or "no"; "go ahead" or "hold back on that." It means access to top administrators when policy or finance or public relations are involved. "Going through channels" is no way to insure a successful project in most large library systems. Questions should be focused, and the answer may be brief, but it is a sign of commitment when the question can be put and the answer is given.

In order to make the program truly nontraditional, established procedures at the colleges also need to be modified. If the only innovative aspect of the program is its location in the library, nothing much that is new is going on. The Study Unlimited student should not have to follow school calendars; only his own calendar of necessity and personal convenience. His examinations should be proctored for him on an individual basis. If he is a competent speaker and writer with enough native intelligence to succeed in college courses, why should he have to waste time and money on GED? If his life and work experience have touched

on competencies taught in college, why should he not have credit for what he has learned? The counselors, under the direction of Mr. Sandy, are intent upon getting the mature student through his first two years of college with as much dispatch as possible so that he can pursue his objectives in a four-year college.

One might raise the question of the financial feasibility of Study Unlimited. Could a small college and a small library collaborate in the same way that CCC and CPL are doing? Could they do so without federal or state funding? If there is commitment to reach-out and coinstitutional cooperation with a philosophy of programed budgeting, there is no reason why not. Few colleges are without video equipment today. Where there is video capability and good teaching, there is the possibility of course production.

Chicago City College courses consist of thirty lessons. Students might master materials in fifteen with good study helps. Video cassettes should be used only to exploit the full potential of the medium; an audio cassette with a printed transcript, outline, or questions answered or suggested by the presentation to provide multisensory input might be just as effective, if only a lecture is involved. A lecturing professor is not a stimulating subject to view for thirty sessions, unless he is an actor, a demonstrator, an interlocutor, or a host as well. Goal-oriented presentations with good teaching techniques and behavioral objectives carefully provided for, are requisite. One study console consisting of a TV monitor and videoplayer will provide twelve viewing periods in a library day, and the cost of the hardware will be about $1,000.

Audio-only courses on cassettes are another possibility. 8mm single-concept loops with sound commentary are another. A 35mm filmstrip with audio accompaniment could also be employed. One course could utilize several of these media, which could be viewed or listened to in a fully-equipped study resource center. After

two years on a multimedia project utilizing these various modes of presentation for self-instruction in a library setting, however, this commentator believes, with the reservations already expressed, that video is the most effective and practical way to go. Machines are durable and require little maintenance. There is ease of operation and interest from multisensory impressions. Materials are available for study or lease, but most intriguingly, opportunities for production abound wherever a well-planned course is being offered. Take a good live class, with plenty of interaction and you have a good videotape. A good teacher would probably be better if he were invited to become a video teacher...a little more planning, some added audio and visual effects, a question and answer period to clear up difficulties for the original class group et voila' you have an effective self-study resource which is easy to add to and edit. Videotapes can be labeled, stored, and cataloged like books.

In conclusion, some answers to the biggest question of all--why this kind of outreach? Why any kind of outreach? There are many answers to this perennial query. What are the alternatives to outreach? Folded arms? Sitting in full awareness, contemplative of surroundings and resources, waiting for the phone to ring? These are melancholy prospects. They do not stimulate the general public to be more supportive of libraries, nor do they motivate grants for seed money to experiment, nor do they move the city council to appropriate funds for the library.

Expensive resources have to be made known, utilized, even exploited in these days of tight funding. If creative responsiveness to people's needs, coinstitutional cooperation in filling them, innovation, even improvisation are

desirable attributes of contemporary librarianship, we need to do more listening to imaginative stimulators like Les Sandy who can function as catalysts to get us going. This is what has happened in Chicago through Study Unlimited, and to date it seems to be a helpful, viable, growing, and developing outreach effort.

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